

B. C. James *24*

The Problem **OF THE** **Indifferent Farmer**

ADDRESS BY
C. C. JAMES



Before the International Association of Farmers'
Institutes Workers, at Washington, D.C.,
November 7th, 1910

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The Problem of the Indifferent Farmer.

Adapting a definition of life as given by some American philosopher, we may say that the life of the people is "just one problem after another." Some of these problems are attacked with intelligence and vigor until they are solved. Others are approached, considered in a more or less casual manner, and then turned down for some other problem more attractive. Other problems, big in size and of great importance in the national life, are not even met with ordinary courtesy, but are treated with extreme indifference. It would be a reflection upon our intelligence to put the problem of the indifferent farmer in the last class. We are giving it some attention, but, considering its size, considering its importance, we must conclude that we are, apparently, not taking hold of it as yet in a manner likely to solve it very soon. We need not take time in discussing the question as to whether there is such a problem. We all know the indifferent farmer; he is here on this American continent by the tens of thousands. We who are workers in the agricultural field come in contact with him. He is to be met with nearly everywhere. He is the burden of our existence; he is largely the excuse for our office. He has been here since work first began, and one can hardly hope that he will ever become entirely extinct. If we had no direct experience with him, we would have strong suspicions of his existence, simply by reading the daily papers,—for are his shortcomings not set forth there from day to day? Frequently, the news editor confuses indifference and dishonesty—for you know there is that curious streak in us which makes a basket of scabby peaches loom as large as a carload of faulty rails, and a dozen small apples in the middle of the barrel rank with the flaw in a forty foot bridge.

How big is this problem? In the Province of Ontario we have 175,000 farms whose annual productions total about \$250,000,000. If by some magic or process of regeneration we could turn all the indifferent farmers into wideawake, progressive, up-to-date farmers, the total production would be easily doubled, and it is not beyond the reach of possibility to treble our output. We have in Canada, as you have in the United States, a Commission for the Conservation of Resources. As far as the Province of Ontario is concerned, we are concerned not so much with the preservation or conservation of our agricultural resources as with the need for expanding and enlarging the agricultural resources that nature has given us, and of keeping production up to demand.

Is it worth our while to take hold of this expansion in real earnest, that is as though we believed it could be done? The possibility of adding two or three hundred million dollars yearly to our rural income surely makes this a big problem. Let me ask right here—Is there any other problem on the American Continent that comes into the same class with it? You, gentlemen, who are engaged in this field know how it is to be worked out. You know the foundation courses upon which this great wealth may be built. These courses are plain and simple:

1. Drain the soil.
2. Sow only the best seed.
3. Carefully protect and store the products of the fields and orchards.
4. Feed field products only to profitable stock.
5. Put the finished product on the market in the best form.

If we could in some way bring the indifferent farmer to the knowledge of those five plain, convincing lines of work, we would have solved the problem; all else involved in agricultural improvement would come easily as a natural sequence. And what a solving of other problems there would be. A man in our Province who has been a farmer for many years said to me the other day, "Push the drainage of land. Spend money on it. If you can get all the farmers to drain their land, you will solve the problem of good roads, for they will have money enough to build

them for themselves." Increase the incomes of the individual farmers and we will have the means at our disposal to renovate, to reconstruct, to develop the rural public school system along rational lines. And so we might enlarge upon this question along many lines. Put more money in the farmers' pockets as the result of his improved work and there will be things doing in the rural constituency that are now existent largely in the hopes and dreams of men who are sometimes called optimists and visionaries.

We might enlarge upon this. The enrichment of the farmers, the improvement of the rural schools, the beautifying of the rural homes, the increase of social advantages, the quickening of intelligence, the moral uplift—all coming out of the stirring into life of the indifferent farmer. You who are working for and among the farmers know as no others do what all this means in the development of a nation along the highest lines.

All this line of development looks to be so simple, and therein is one of the greatest difficulties—it is its simplicity that makes it so difficult. If we could present a problem more intricate and more daring, we could expect to set the people to its solution. Look over the great problems that have attracted the people of influence, the people of initiative power, the people who control the creative forces and the distribution of wealth. This simple problem of stirring up the indifferent farmer to activity does not as yet appeal to the people as it deserves. Here are two areas of land, ten million acres each in extent. The one is occupied by farmers, good, bad and indifferent. The other area is unoccupied, it is as nature made it, but it is five hundred miles away. Two questions arise—shall we develop the agriculture of the occupied area, double its production, double its population, and again double its production; or shall we set to work to build a railroad to that unoccupied land, there to repeat the experience of the former section—farmers, good, bad and indifferent? You know what would be done. Millions would be available for the more daring proposition and thousands only for the other.

It is easier to build a dreadnaught than an agricultural college. We can arouse the interest of two continents in solving the problem of aerial navigation, but it is difficult to get the people

to demand—no, let me put it more mildly—it is difficult to get the people to support enthusiastically the proposition of spending money freely in teaching the indifferent farmer how to drain his land, why he should use only the best seeds, why he should test his dairy cows, why and how he should spray his apple trees, and how, in short, he can increase his income by one thousand dollars a year.

This brings us to the question as to how we are to solve the *problem of the indifferent public*. You will understand that when I refer to the indifferent public I am speaking in general terms. There are persons who have an inspiration as to the greatness of this work, and there are some places where this problem is being worked out; but, on the whole, the public are more or less indifferent to the importance of the work, judging by their actions, or rather inactions. If the development of our agriculture means the greatest wealth creation within the nation, and if the stirring of the indifferent farmer to better things is the key to the situation, why do not our people—manufacturers, bankers, professional men, business men, and intelligent farmers—rise in a mass and demand that this work be undertaken and carried through? There are at least two reasons: In the first place, there is a too prevalent opinion that work done among and for the farmers is a charitable contribution to a class that should be able to take care of themselves. What a woeful misconception of this movement! Helping the farmers to larger production and to larger life can be justified only on the ground that thereby we are contributing to the prosperity and uplift of the whole community. A town of 5,000 people is surrounded by a farming community. Through the agricultural uplift, \$1,000,000 could easily be added to the annual production of the surrounding and contributing country. Is it conceivable that such an addition could be made without touching every banker, every manufacturer, every storekeeper, every doctor, every lawyer, every newspaper owner in the town? First and foremost then it seems to me that we must take the problem of the indifferent farmer out of the country and bring it into the town and city, we must, in addition to discussing it at the Farmers' Institute.

and the Farmers' Club, put it up to the Board of Trade, the Bankers' Association, the Retail Merchants' Association, and even the County Teachers' Convention. It has been a local question; we must make it a national question. We must bring people to see that it is not charity or local contribution, but merely the investment of public funds that will bring ample returns to the whole people.

In the next place, we have not yet succeeded in getting the men of influence behind this movement. And I admit, at once, that herein there is much difficulty. We can get their approval and their blessing, but what we want is their support and backing, in season and out of season. If only we could interest in this work a large number of men who have built up the great industries of this country, who have planned the great undertakings, who have built the railroads, dug the canals, erected factories, organized financial institutions, laid pipe lines and strung power cables; if we had a host of men like J. J. Hill of the Great Northern, and President Brown of the New York Central Lines, men who are able to size up this question not simply as one of personal profit, but as one of national importance—then we could hurry along the movement. What is required is that our people and especially those who control expenditure and direct public energies shall look upon the spending of money for agricultural development in the same way as they do the constructing of a bridge, the digging of a canal, the building of a railway, as an investment of the people's money for the benefit of the whole people. When that condition of affairs arrives, when this agricultural problem is put on a business basis, and is considered from its national standpoint, it will not be a question of—How little can we get along with? but, Where and how can we spend more money so as to bring good profits to the people as a whole?

We are a great people on this side of the Atlantic—at least we think we are—but I know nothing more stimulating and more corrective for us who are engaged in agricultural work than a visit now and then to some of the countries of Europe, especially those lying adjacent to the North Sea. France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden are worth visiting. In

these countries we see intensive agriculture, farming carried on along the lines of our market gardening, co-operation practised along the most successful lines, the best of seeds and the best of stock considered none too good for the average farmer. But the one thing that impresses you is the general public interest in agricultural pursuits, the recognition by all, including the leaders of state, that agriculture is a matter of common interest and is deserving of the best that can be given. One outcome of this is that it is in these countries an education is provided for the average farmer that is intended to equip him for his life work. The indifferent farmer is not so much in evidence in these countries as he is in many sections of this continent.

Let me again emphasize this point. One of the most important factors in the future development of agriculture on this continent will be in getting not only the approval of the city people in our efforts to upbuild agriculture, but their hearty support; more than that, their enforced demand that agriculture be assisted and developed as the greatest contributing element in the prosperity of the whole people. We must get the town and city people awakened to the possibilities, and to do this we should have the powerful support of the press and through it reach the city organizations. It is all very well for some of the papers to call attention from time to time to inferior farm products that find their way to market and to preach a little sermon on the subject for the benefit of the farmer; what is wanted is the providing of ways and means whereby the farmer can be shown the better way. We go about these things too often in the wrong way. Let me give you an example. There was held recently in the city of Toronto a meeting of Produce Commission Merchants to discuss the question of bad eggs. The result of that meeting was the passing of a resolution asking the Dominion Minister of Agriculture to have enacted stringent legislation against the marketing of stale eggs by the farmer. That, of course, was the easiest proposal to make, easier to suggest than to carry out. One not engaged in the handling of eggs might suggest that the merchants have the remedy in their own hands—"refuse to buy stale eggs." That, however, might upset relations that may not

be even too pleasant at all times. But is there not a still better way? Suppose these merchants had said: "The marketing of stale eggs is in the long run bad business for the farmer, it is a losing game for the commission merchant, and it is certainly an aggravation and a loss to the consumer. Let us ask that the farmer be taught the better way." We have only to go to Denmark to see what that better way is. And here I might mention that already in two of our counties we are trying out this better way, not by legislation, not by preaching, not by scolding, but by the enthusiastic missionary work of some men set apart for the work, two of whom are the district representatives of our Department, and the practical backing of a big Commission House. They are reaching the indifferent farmers and by a house to house canvass are working little short of a miracle, accomplishing results that years of legislation would fail to do. Even the subject of fresh eggs is important enough to engage the attention of statesmen. They certainly think so when they sit down to the breakfast table in the morning. It is a big question, too. There's millions in it. The egg production of the United States in 1909 was worth, I understand, considerably over \$500,000,000. When the United States put up the bars against Canadian farm products in 1890, they shut out Canadian eggs. At that time we had a surplus. Last year eggs from Russia and from China were imported into Canada, and while I am writing this the daily papers inform us that eggs from Germany are on sale in the city of Toronto. Let us stop passing the question by with a joke; let us stop threatening; let us give the farmer and the farmer's wife and their little flock of chickens a fair chance. There is a way of doing it and it is worth serious thought and a liberal investment of the people's money. Eggs may be laid because the hens like to do so, or perhaps because they cannot help it, but let us get this into our heads that from the public standpoint they are produced for general public consumption. The consumer is as much interested as the producer—it is in the general public interest that the indifferent farmer be shown the best and most profitable way of handling eggs and finishing poultry for market. In short, it is time for the general public to stop criticising,

to demand that thorough work be done and to see to it that funds are provided for the efficient carrying out of the work. In other words, we need a change of attitude, a new spirit, an awakening of the whole people to their co-operation and responsibility in the matter. How easy it is to get some great movements under way; how difficult to awaken the whole people to an appreciation of their direct interest in this agricultural matter. Every once in a while a large part of the people get it into their heads that things are going wrong and then they do things. We have even known them to go to the polls and cast their ballots for the other fellows and think that thus they are going to set matters right. What we need is to get people to think things out to their origin, and having thought things out then to do things.

How are we going to reach and teach the indifferent farmer? This is perhaps the important question. You all have your answers, for I doubt not there are many. That is the work you are engaged in. That is what brings you here in conference. There are two lines in operation in Ontario that I would refer to briefly.

Next week we expect to gather together in the Convocation Hall of the University of Toronto a thousand women from the farms, villages, towns, and even the cities of Ontario. They will be the delegates from over three hundred Women's Institutes of our Province, mainly representing the farm homes of Ontario. This is a movement the force and energy and regenerating power of which no man dare measure. The farmer's home is the centre of his work. It is not only his home but also the headquarters of his business operations. If we can capture the farmer's home, we believe we will have him at our command, to move him, to mould him, to inspire him to better things. Give us possession of the farmer's home and we believe we can revolutionize the farmer's life and work. We propose to gain possession of the home through the farmer's wife. The Women's Institutes have a grand mission to perform: it will do what the Farmers' Institutes alone could never do. There are farm improvements which we propose to introduce through the home, there is a reconstruction of social life that can come only through the home, and I can even see signs that the

rural school may be enlarged and uplifted by the farmer's wife when the farmer himself has failed through his apparent indifference.

And then we are trying out the work of reaching the indifferent farmer by the agricultural missionary, that combination of agricultural teacher and district representative of the Department of Agriculture, which is working so well in Ireland and along certain lines in the Southern States. When a young man of practical training, equipped with the modern expert knowledge and experience which a good agricultural college affords, is dropped down among a lot of indifferent farmers as a permanent resident, when he takes off his coat and goes to work showing the farmer a better way and helping him to make more money at his work, something is going to happen and something is already happening with us—the indifferent farmer is having his eyes opened. Three years ago we started this work in six counties. This year we carried it on in sixteen centres. In one county, not only was there indifference, there was direct opposition. The county council passed a resolution condemning the whole thing as a needless waste of public money. To-day there would be trouble if we suggested stopping the work; in fact, two other sections of the same county are urging the opening of offices and starting similar work in connection with their High Schools.

In carrying on our movement for agricultural uplift in Ontario there are three things to be considered:

1st. The plan.

2nd. The men and women to carry out the plan.

3rd. The money to provide the men and women.

1st. The plan.—We have the Province of Ontario fairly well organized for agricultural work. There are

340 Agricultural Societies.

64 Horticultural Societies.

100 Farmers' Institutes.

164 Farmers' Clubs.

600 Women's Institutes.

30 Co-operative Fruit Growers' Associations.

26 Local Poultry Associations.

10 Local Horse Associations.

In addition to the above there are many provincial associations in connection with dairying, fruit growing, live stock, poultry, etc. It is, however, through the local district or county associations that the District Representative will be able to carry on his county work. The above associations are, in the main, composed of the enterprising, wide-awake farmers, the men who appreciate help, who are asking for help and who, to a large extent, are able to help themselves. It is not of these that I am speaking. They are available and in many cases are willing and eager to help the indifferent farmer, the man who reads but little, who seldom attends an institute meeting, who is unmoved by what he hears of others, who is to be moved only by the close personal touch and the active sympathy aroused through bringing better ways right into his own field, his own orchard, his own farm and his own home. These associations of active men present a means whereby demonstration work can be brought home directly to the farmer by short courses of a practical nature. What they require mainly is direction and inspiration. The report in one of our leading agricultural papers of a conference of representatives of Farmers' Institutes and Farmers' Clubs referred to the District Representatives as follows:

"These young men are doing things. They took perhaps about ten minutes each to give their addresses, but they were full of optimism, for they are getting the hearts of the people and they are already getting results. Institute managers and secretaries who have gone home without being impressed by the work of these young men have missed procuring the touchstone which will bring success to their work."

2nd. The men.—Here is where the Agricultural College comes into the scheme. Our College at Guelph has at the present time 344 students in its regular course: 1st year, 149; 2nd year, 88; 3rd year, 57; 4th year, 50; extra, 6. After January 1st there will be probably 300 more taking short courses. We expect that band of fifty in the fourth year to supply us with the additional men required to man the work at the new offices and to supply us with

assistants in the offices already established. The scheme you see is an extension of agricultural work that carries the College to every part of the province and brings into co-operation all the forces available in all the other branches of the Department of Agriculture.

And what about the women? Our problem would be solved much more quickly if only we could supplement the work by having trained women missionaries in the rural parts, working in and through the Women's Institutes, carrying domestic science instruction to all the rural schools and helping to improve the social life of the countryside. The Director of Home Economics at Macdonald Institute, which is part of our Agricultural College, has her plans all ready; she has a large band of young women training for such work; all that is needed for carrying out her part of the plan is *money*.

3rd. The money.—We have this year about \$780,000 to spend in agricultural work in Ontario. To carry this work into every county and district of the province, to man all the branches of the Department and meet the requirements of the Agricultural College to keep pace with demands, we need approximately \$250,000 more annually. At first this looks like a big sum, but in comparison with an annual output of \$250,000,000 from 175,000 farms it is not so large. We are now spending on agricultural improvement just thirty cents apiece yearly for every person in the province. What we need is just ten cents apiece more. Shall we get it? Of course we shall if we make out a good case and public opinion gets behind it. We can get public opinion behind it if we can show results. These are coming. In fact, they are here for those who will take the pains to look for them. We are trying to make them so plain that it will be impossible not to see them.

The Dominion Government could give us this amount without missing it. If the Government of Canada were to divide only \$1,000,000 annually among the different provinces for the extension of agricultural work, there would be an immediate expansion of work that would show itself in increased customs receipts. I believe that every dollar so invested would be returned many times over in increased customs. The business man is shrewd who knows how

to invest his surplus cash so as to produce more. Sometimes it pays him to borrow to carry out his plans. Our governments should follow the example of the successful business man. As far as the Department of Agriculture is concerned, it is not saying where the money should come from. It has the plan, the men can be found, the work can be done, results can be had, if only the money is forthcoming.

To bring this question to the attention of representative bodies has been the concern of some of us of the Department for years past, but particularly during the past three years. We have talked on it to Canadian Clubs, the Manufacturers' Association, Young Men's Church Clubs, Retail Merchants' Associations, the Press Club, and even to the Daughters of the Empire. The Chairman of the Canadian Commission on Conservation of Resources is taking a deep interest in the matter, and now we understand that the Boards of Trade of Ontario are going to consider it. There will likely be something doing.

Waken up the indifferent farmer and you develop one of the greatest assets of the country. It is not like taking gold or silver out of the ground never to be replaced; it is not like cutting down trees with the hope that others will grow up in the next fifty years; it is not like hauling fish out of the water that someone may be fed; no, it is better than all these, for you are bringing into productivity a living asset. I know no work that any country on this continent can engage in that promises bigger returns for everyone than the rational stimulating and helping of the indifferent farmer to better ways and better living. The banker wishes the farmer to produce more, because it is upon the accumulation of his earnings that our banks depend; the railways want more stuff to haul to and fro; the manufacturer wishes the demands of the farmers to be increased; the storekeeper is looking for the increase of purchasing power in the farmer; and the country school teacher is hoping for better pay—all classes want more money in circulation. Then why, as a people, do we not get down to the consideration of this question in a manner comporting with its importance? Let us devise things not from the narrow standpoint of the needy farmer, but, having in view the national importance of the question, put

into it some of the energy and the brains and the money that we have put into transportation questions and city expansion. If we could get our legislators and our city millionaires to turn their eyes towards the rural parts and take hold of the question in earnest, there would be a national development in this country that was never dreamed of by the most ardent enthusiast. Let us keep in mind and compel others to pay attention to the regeneration of the indifferent farmer, for he is the greatest undeveloped asset of either Canada or the United States.
